

Testimony in SUPPORT of HB 5430 “An Act Concerning Opioids”

Dear Members of the Public Health Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Karron Cohoon. I am a Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner specializing in the care of individuals with substance use disorders, and I have over 25 years of healthcare experience.

First, I thank you for including the legalization of fentanyl test strips in HB 5430. Research supports the use of fentanyl test strips as a harm reduction strategy for the prevention of opioid-related overdoses.

Second, I hope that in HB 5430, you will add to the prescription drug monitoring program (PDMP) the use of methadone as a treatment for opioid use disorders. Currently, methadone is included in the PDMP only as a treatment for pain. Its omission for other rationales is a serious oversight.

As a healthcare provider, I find the PDMP to be a helpful asset to providing safe patient care. In the state of Connecticut, all scheduled II-V controlled substances (i.e., oxycontin, hydrocodone, codeine) are reported to the PDMP. However, methadone dispensed for the treatment of an opioid use disorder is not being reported to the PDMP despite it being a Scheduled II medication ([ct.gov](https://www.ct.gov), 2022.)

The primary rationale for including methadone for the treatment of opioid use disorder in the PDMP is **patient safety concerns**: methadone interacts with many other medications which can lead to lethal cardiac arrhythmias, impaired medication metabolism, sedation, and precipitated withdrawal (Drugs.com, 2022). Because of the potential for these drug/drug interactions, methadone must be included in the PDMP. As a prescriber, it is imperative that I know whether my patients are receiving methadone from another provider. Without this information, I may inadvertently prescribe a medication that could interact with methadone and cause harm to my patients.

Here are two personal patient experiences to illustrate why methadone for the treatment of opioid use disorder must be included in the PDMP:

- I had a recently widowed grandfather who was enrolled in a methadone program and received prescribed benzodiazepines from a provider unaware of his methadone use. Because of the combination of these two medications, this gentleman experienced a non-lethal overdose that resulted in an emergency hospitalization.
- I had a successful businessman who had an opiate use disorder, and I prescribed buprenorphine for home induction. Unfortunately, I was not aware that he had also been prescribed methadone. As a result of his exposure to methadone and buprenorphine, he suffered an adverse drug/drug interaction that precipitated an acute opiate withdrawal. Sadly, he returned to opioid use (IV fentanyl) for the management of his withdrawal symptoms.

As demonstrated in these patient stories, the lack of reporting methadone for the treatment of opioid use disorders in the PDMP has the potential for causing significant patient harm. If methadone is added to the PDMP, I believe we will see improved quality of patient care and reduced prescription misuse, overdose, and potentially lethal drug/drug interactions. This change would also allow providers the opportunity to safely manage the patient's treatment, including referral for treatment of substance use disorders when appropriate.

While passing this bill may create additional administrative work for methadone providers and state agencies, these critical patient safety concerns must take precedence over administrative concerns.

I support HB 5430: “An Act Concerning Opioids” with the provision that methadone, for the treatment of opioid use disorder, is included in the PDMP in order to prevent needless harm. Thank you for this opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Karron Cohoon, PMHNP-BC, AGPCNP-BC

References

CT.gov. (2022). Department of Consumer Protection. Prescriber information. Retrieved from <https://portal.ct.gov/DCP/Prescription-Monitoring-Program/Prescriber-Information>

Drugs.com. (2022). Drug Interactions Checker. Retrieved from https://www.drugs.com/drug_interactions.html